



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SECRETARY WHITLOCK MESSAGE

There is no shortage of scammers looking to take advantage of people online, by phone, through the mail, or in person. And unfortunately, veterans are not excluded.

Scammers know too well that one of the best ways to scam a veteran is to pretend to be a veteran, or some group that is friendly to military consumers. They use jargon to craft a cause or a story that sounds genuine. Once a sense of camaraderie is established, the fraudsters pitch a fake charity, a false promise for free materials, or a variety of other scams targeting veterans, military personnel, and their families.

One of the recent scams we have heard about is scammers targeting veterans to help military personnel that are in trouble in a foreign country. Scammers know that veterans have a special bond and have unending support for the men and women that serve. There is a bond joining every veteran from every branch of the service. Whether drafted or enlisted, commissioned or non-commissioned, each took an oath, lived by a code, and stood ready to fight and die for their country.

You know what they say, "if it seems too good to be true, it probably is." Information is the key to foiling scam artists. Before committing to help and before you open your wallet, do your research. Be skeptical, take your time, and do your homework.

If you or someone you know falls victim to a scam, you should reach out to the South Dakota Attorney General's office (605.773.3215) or email consumerhelp@state.sd.us.

You can also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission, either online or by dialing 877.382.4357. If the fraud came through the internet, you could also report it to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Internet Crime Complaint Center at 202.324.3000.

Again, if you think it's a scam, it's probably a scam. Don't get pressured to decide on the spot.



SDNG Award Recognition	2
SDNG Award Recognition	3
SOS Anderson Recognized	4
SOS Anderson Recognized.....	5
Folds of Honor	6
Homeless Census.....	7
Taking Baghdad	8
Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications ...	9
VA Home Adaptions.....	10
SDDVA Upcoming Events.....	11

SD GUARD PRESENTS AWARDS FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE DURING ANNUAL DINING OUT

The South Dakota National Guard presented awards for distinguished service to a family, employer, and a public servant during its annual Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Feb. 3.

The annual event brings together National Guard members from across the state for a formal evening to honor the organization's history and to recognize individual achievements from the past year.

The awards presented include recognition of outstanding volunteerism by a SDNG family, outstanding support from a South Dakota Reserve Component employer, and a public servant for lifetime service in support of the SDNG mission.

The event keynote speaker Gov. Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general, presented the awards.

Spearfish Middle School was awarded the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award. The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support to national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.

First Lieutenants Leslie and Josh Wangeman, who both work as eighth grade science teachers, nominated their employer for the award. Josh serves with the 842nd Engineer Company and Leslie serves with the 211th Engineer Company.

According to the Wangemans, Spearfish Middle School goes above and beyond in their responsibilities to ensure both are successful in their military careers. When the Wangeman's were both gone for a five-month training program, which overlapped the school year, the school examined its policies towards military service and added a military leave policy, ensuring it followed all USERRA requirements protecting service member employment rights.

Additionally, when the 842nd Engineer Company was activated in January 2021 in support of the 59th Presidential Inauguration, the school was extremely supportive of their activation for service, despite short notice. The district covered all their substitute teacher plans, giving Leslie and Josh the ability to concentrate on their mission with minimum distraction.

Through its leadership and practices, the Spearfish Middle School has made it easier for those serving in uniform to fulfill their duties and obligations as members of the National Guard and Reserve.



(continued on next page)

SDNG AWARDS (CONTINUED)

The Adjutant General's Family Award was presented to the Stiegelmeier Family. The award recognizes family members who support their service members in a truly exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices.

Master Sgt. Kevin Stiegelmeier, his wife, Ann, and their three children are the epitome of a resilient military family. Kevin is a member of the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade of Sioux Falls.

The Stiegelmeier's support to the SDNG Family Readiness Group Program has been a whole-family effort for the past 20 years. Since 2001, the Stiegelmeiers have supported multiple units through many deployments.

While their children started out only being participants in unit FRG activities, they progressively became more engaged in the program over time, volunteering to assist with different groups, events, and activities. In 2018, Ann stepped up to be the 196th MEB's Family Readiness Group lead volunteer as the unit prepared and mobilized for a deployment to Africa. Kevin and Ann's daughter, Alison, also volunteered to be the FRG's treasurer during this time. The Stiegelmeier's guidance and insight into family readiness has provided much comfort to those experiencing the difficulties of deployment and the sacrifices which all endure during them - especially for those families experiencing it for the first time.

The Williamson Militiaman Award recipient is Michele Anderson of Rapid City. The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier or Airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of the country.

Anderson has been supporting the military and its families for over 26 years. She is a former member of the SDNG, enlisting in 1997 as an administrative specialist with the 109th Engineer Group. She also served six years working fulltime in recruiting and education.

Following her military service in 2003, Anderson began working as a contractor for the SDNG as the Family Assistance Center coordinator, where she helped prepare and assist families through the deployment process.

After ten years of directly supporting South Dakota families, Anderson was selected by National Guard Bureau to train the Family Assistance Program at the national level helping to educate 420 family assistance center staff.

In 2015, Michelle came back to the South Dakota National Guard to serve as its Survivor Outreach Services coordinator. As such, Michelle ensures survivors of fallen service members remain valued members of the Army family. Her work bridges the connections for survivors by providing life skills education, expertise and tracking of military benefits, access to bereavement or financial counselors, and assisting with management of milestones.



SOS COORDINATOR PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR SURVIVING FAMILIES OF FALLEN

For families of fallen service members, the death of their loved one is a very difficult and emotional time. These survivors must adjust to life without their service member, and they may be left wondering who to turn to for support.

For the families of fallen soldiers from South Dakota, they turn to Michele Anderson for assistance. As a member of the South Dakota National Guard's Service Member and Family Support team in Rapid City, Anderson serves as the state's coordinator for Survivor Outreach Services, a U.S. Army program designed to provide long-term assistance to surviving families.

As a SOS support coordinator for the past six years at Camp Rapid, Anderson ensures survivors remain valued members of the Army family.

"The purpose of Survivor Outreach Services is to deliver the Army's commitment to families of the fallen," Anderson said. "When a service member dies, families are forced to deal with the loss of their loved one, and our military families should not have to lose their military connection."

Support coordinators help to bridge that connection for survivors by providing life skills education, expertise and tracking of military benefits, access to bereavement or financial counselors, and assisting with management of milestones and goal setting.

"I have the opportunity to ensure every survivor receives all they are entitled to," Anderson said. "Benefits and entitlements do not just automatically occur and many are timed benefits. Ensuring survivors do not miss any important timelines and requirement is something I take great pride in."

The SOS program provides services for the entire state and for the different components of the Army (active duty, National Guard or Reserve). Regardless of a soldier's duty status, location, or manner of death, the program is there for South Dakota families and for as long as family members' desire.

According to Anderson, every casualty case is unique as are the needs and expectations of the survivors. The SOS program provides a tailored response specific to the needs of the family.

"Losing a loved one is not only an emotional loss but can be the loss of community, financial stability, and hopes and dreams," Anderson said. "The SOS program provides survivors with a connection to other survivors, as well as specialized support to help navigate the challenges that come with losing a loved one."



(continued on next page)

SOS ANDERSON (CONTINUED)

Anderson has been supporting the military and families for 26 years. She enlisted in the SDNG in 1997 as an administrative specialist with the 109th Engineer Group. Anderson also served for six years working fulltime in recruiting and education. Following her military service in 2003, she began working as a contractor for the SDNG as the Family Assistance Center coordinator, preparing and assisting families during the mobilization and reintegration of their deployed service member.

After more than 10 years as the FAC coordinator, Anderson was selected to serve as a national trainer for the National Guard Bureau's Family Assistance Program, helping to train 420 family assistance center staff across the nation. Anderson also served for three years as the Family Readiness Group lead volunteer for the SDNG's 196th Regional Training Institute.

In addition to her work supporting families, Anderson is also a spouse and mother. She and her husband, retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brett Anderson, have been married for 20 years and they have three children. Anderson's family support helps drive her work assisting others.



"Our family truly embraces the sacrifice service members and families make each and every day," said Anderson. "Brett and I both are devoted to serving our state and nation. As parents, our children have been raised to understand our American life isn't without cost and sacrifice. The drive of our success is attributed to honoring all those that make the same commitment of duty and service."

Anderson began her work as the South Dakota SOS coordinator in 2015. Since then, she has supported over 800 survivors and today is actively supporting over 400 of them. On Feb. 3, Anderson was awarded the SDNG's 2022 Williamson Militiaman Award for her lifetime of service in support of military families and the SDNG mission.

"Michelle Anderson embodies the spirit of the Williamson Militiaman Award and we are honored to have her as part of our family," said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general. "The level of support and excellence she provides is truly outstanding and we cannot thank her enough for her service and dedication to our military families."

Anderson says successful support to families is attributed to being organized and persistently determined to ensure survivors are in receipt of all they are due. Each survivor has individual circumstances and situations that contribute to the eligibility of benefits and entitlements.

While the SOS program is there to support survivors, there is something simple anyone can do to help support a family that has lost a loved one.

For the surviving families of South Dakota's fallen soldiers, they can take comfort in knowing the SOS program and Michele Anderson will be there for them to turn to for care, compassion and support.

FOLDS OF HONOR SCHOLARSHIP

Beginning for the 2022-23 school year, Folds of Honor will be awarding academic scholarships for post-graduate work, including a master's degree, doctorate, or professional program. Applications for a second bachelor's degree or trade/technical program certification will also be accepted.

Folds of Honor continues to provide educational scholarships supporting private school tuition or tutoring in grades K-12, as well as post-secondary tuition (two-or-four-year college/university, technical, or trade school). No changes were made in the Children's Fund scholarships.

Folds of Honor is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that awards educational scholarships to the spouses and children of military members who have fallen or been disabled while serving in the United States Armed Forces.

Since its inception in 2007, the foundation has awarded over 35,000 scholarships totaling over \$160 million in all 50 states. Among the students served, 41 percent are minorities. It is rated a four-star charity by Charity Navigator and Platinum on GuideStar. It was founded by Lt Col Dan Rooney, the only-ever F-16 fighter pilot and PGA Professional, who is currently stationed at Eglin AFB, Florida as a member of the 301st Fighter Squadron.



FOLDS of HONOR



For the 2021-22 academic year, approximately 7,000 scholarships were provided totaling nearly \$35 million. Among the recipients, 41 percent were minorities and 56 percent women.

The application period for all 2022-23 scholarships opened February 1 and closes on March 31. Individuals can visit foldsofhonor.org/scholarships to review scholarship criteria.

For additional information please contact Glenn Greenspan at ggreenspan@foldsofhonor.org.

VA, HUD AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS CONDUCT ANNUAL HOMELESS CENSUS

As part of its continued work towards ending veteran homelessness, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs is participating in the 2022 Point-in-Time Count led by the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) this winter to estimate the number of veterans living in America without safe, stable housing.

The data collected from annual PIT Counts is used to conduct gap analyses and form the basis for distributing [Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing](#) vouchers to [partnering public housing authorities](#) and VA medical centers across the country, with particular focus on areas where vouchers are needed most.

“Sustainable housing is directly tied to positive health outcomes and the annual Point-in-Time Count is integral in helping us gain a better understanding of the challenges homeless veterans face,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “The economic crisis resulting from COVID-19 has increased the need for outreach to these priority groups and we will continue to identify homeless and at-risk veterans throughout the country in need of supportive services.”

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S. has declined by nearly half since 2011 with more than 920,000 veterans and their family members permanently housed or prevented from becoming homeless.

Veterans experiencing homelessness should visit their local VA medical center for assistance. To find the nearest VA medical center, visit www.va.gov/find-locations. For immediate assistance, contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838).

For more information about the VA PIT Count go to [VA Homeless Programs](#).



**U.S. Department of
Housing and Urban Development**

TAKING BAGHDAD

Staff Sergeant Aaron Grant retired from the United States Marine Corps in 2008 after serving a combat tour with Bravo Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Marine Division in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is the award-winning author of *Taking Baghdad: Victory in Iraq with the US Marines* featured at Barnes and Noble.

Grant will be at the Sioux Falls Barnes and Noble on February 12-13 for a book signing.

Grant was a M88-A2 HERCULES crewman in Iraq, a Combat Correspondent at Camp Pendleton, California, and a Combat Marksmanship Trainer at Quantico, Virginia. He holds a Master's Degree in Military History from Norwich University received in 2014, and currently teaches history, civics, and literature. He is also an active leading member of the Marine Corps League as a certified peer-supporter helping veterans to heal at home.

Staff Sergeant Grant took sixteen years to write his first book called "Taking Baghdad: Victory in Iraq with the US Marines." Currently an award winner in Barnes and Noble, the true account is as much history of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as it is a memoir by Grant who weaves context into a journey you will not forget. It is insightful and heartbreaking; coupled with poetry and tactics in a military history that stands alone in its ability to appeal to all audiences. Nothing is sugar-coated and nothing came easy on the road to Baghdad. Live with the author as he takes you through the desert in war, and back home to raging peace.

Taking Baghdad is the only history of Operation Iraqi Freedom written by a Marine who actually served in the war. This book is for the soldier as it is for the civilian, and for the historian as it is for the young who need to understand war. So much more than history, the audience will keep *Taking Baghdad* on their shelves because of its personality, a deep connection with the author as he takes you on a journey through the desert, history and combat, context and strategy, tactics and even poetry; it will leave you speechless.

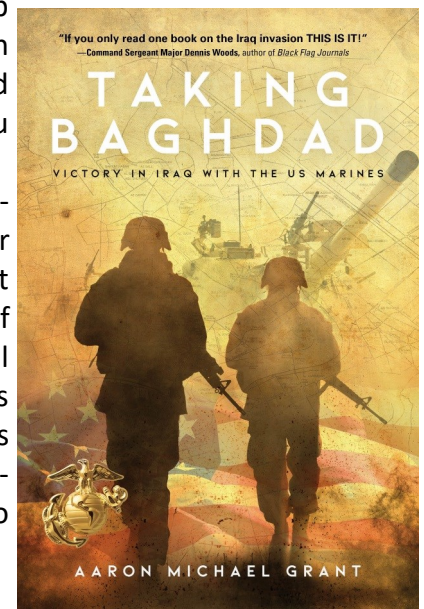
Taking Baghdad is a dynamic account of the real struggles of war; an historical memoir with context over tactics, Grant illuminates success in Iraq for those who see Iraq for what it became afterward: a war in which America lost heart. Written on sand-covered pages during the invasion and *fifteen* years of study afterward, the author guides us in his boots in 2003; a lowly Corporal who had but a small part to play in theater. Educating and powerful, prayers and even poetry make this a truly unique history in which the author has poured his all. But the story is not over when Baghdad falls. The author beckons us to more; hoping *Taking Baghdad* will help veterans, and anyone who fights Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; reaching out that a life might be saved.

Here are links to his Facebook page or to buy the book:

https://www.amazon.com/Taking-Baghdad-Victory-Iraq-Marines/dp/1633937917/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Taking+Baghdad&qid=1581106252&sr=8-1

https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/taking-baghdad-aaron-michael-grant/1130417596;jsessionid=377524BB349EE263E5A131417690CFC6.prodny_store02-atgap03?ean=9781633937918

<https://www.facebook.com/takingbaghdad/>



NOMINATIONS BEING ACCEPTED FOR FALLEN HERO BRIDGE DEDICATIONS

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is accepting nominations for South Dakota's "Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication" program.

South Dakota has dedicated 18 bridges honoring 21 heroes since dedications started in 2019. To learn more about the program and to view stories on bridge honorees, visit: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Fallen%20Hero%20Bridge%20Dedications/Bridge%20Heroes.aspx>.

In 2022, South Dakota will dedicate six more state bridges in honor of fallen heroes that died while serving in combat or classified as missing in action. More than 3,000 South Dakotans have made the ultimate sacrifice. To view the list of South Dakota casualties by county, visit: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/War%20Casualties%20by%20County.aspx>

Naming South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen gives us an opportunity for remembrance, reflection, and respect – honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life.

Nominations are due by April 1 to the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs with all supporting documentation attached. The simple, online form is available at: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Fallen%20Hero%20Bridge%20Dedications/SDDOM%20SDDVA%20Bridge%20Naming%20Application.pdf>.

Nominators are encouraged to indicate their preferred state bridge site for their respective hero.



VA FUNDING AVAILABLE TO CREATE TECHNOLOGY HELPING ELIGIBLE SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS ADAPT THEIR HOMES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has [Specially Adapted Housing Assistive Technology](#) grants available for fiscal year 2022 to develop new technologies that enhance the ability of seriously disabled service members and veterans to live more independently.

The VA encourages researchers, organizations and individual technology developers to apply for SAHAT grant funding via [Grants.gov](#) by 11:59 p.m., ET, March. 11, to develop specially adapted housing assistive technologies that will improve the livability of veterans' adapted residences.

The VA issues the Notice of Funding Opportunity in the Federal Register to foster competition among technology developers, funding innovation that will best serve the needs of certain seriously disabled service members and veterans.

Since 2016, when the VA awarded its first SAHAT grant, the VA has awarded 22 grants. To date, these grants have resulted in the introduction of new products to the accessibility industry used to improve the lives of veterans, including:

- AI-powered mobile scanner and reader enabling blind and visually impaired users to read text independently.
- Smart guidance: a customized disability-adapted bathroom module designed to bring users closer to independent living by providing a safer bathroom environment and permitting home care.
- Robotic overbed table for beds, recliners and wheelchairs allowing users to independently deploy, position and store mobile devices using accessible switches or a remote from a bed or chair.

"Awarding up to \$200,000 per grant to develop technology will ultimately help make homes more livable for seriously disabled service members and veterans," said Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits Mike Frueh. "In addition to the SAHAT program, the VA also administers [Specially Adapted Housing grants](#) to eligible service members and veterans with certain serious service-connected disabilities to purchase or adapt a home that suits their individual needs."

To learn more about SAHAT, visit [VA.gov](#) and [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#).



UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 18-20—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
Feb 21—State Offices Closed
Feb 26-27—SD Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Moose Lodge—Mitchell
Feb 27-Mar 2—DAV Mid Winter Conference—Washington, DC
Feb 27-Mar 3—National VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
Mar 10—Crossroads—Virtual Event—5:15 pm—8:00 pm (MST)
Mar 26—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior Lutheran Church (909) W. 33rd Street—Sioux Falls—8:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City
Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds—Mitchell
Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls
Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls
Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Don't forget your veteran on Valentines Day!
Do something special for them and remember
to thank them for their service.



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501
Phone: 605-773-8242
E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

